

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Key Notes great way to access data

Instant access to any frequently accessed information is now available to everyone in your office who uses an IBM PC or PC-compatible computer. With a new \$100 program called Key Notes, all the operator has to do is touch a special key on the keyboard and a box pops up on the screen with whatever predefined information you enter.

Key Notes is a great little program, but not perfect in some situations — it has one serious drawback.

One of the best features of Key Notes is that it can be tailored to fit the requirements of each person who uses a personal computer. A telephone order-taker's computer may pop up with a product price list. An input operator's computer could pop up with a list of common abbreviations, and a bookkeeper's computer could pop up with a list of account numbers.

Two things make Key Notes special and very useful: first, the box, sometimes called a window, pops up right in the middle of whatever other program you happen to be running, simply suspending that program momentarily; and second, the response is absolutely instant — much faster than flipping pages in a notebook or hunting through a desk drawer to find needed information.

Here's how it works:

✓ If you're setting up the windows, you start out by entering into the computer the information that will later be accessed. This is easily done using a pro-

gram that comes with Key Notes called "Noted." Alternatively, you can import the data from another program where the information currently resides, but this method is too complicated to use very often. If you wanted to enter the prices of Widget A, Widget B, Wid-

get C, etc., the price for each may vary, depending on quantity ordered, options selected and other factors. So the first thing you do is set up a menu that simply lists the names. This will be the initial box that pops on the screen.

✓ Next, you can enter the specific prices for Widget A in one box, Widget B in another and so on. Now, when the operator moves the cursor to the appropriate Widget name and touches the return key, the box with the specific information pops up.

For the operator using the predefined Key Notes boxes, it's a breeze. And depending upon how well it's set up and how often it's used, it can be a real productivity-enhancer.

Unfortunately, it has one serious drawback that will limit its effectiveness in many offices: the operator can't easily correct or change the information in the boxes. Ideally, if he or she views data that contains an error or needs updating, the change should be able to be made immediately. But it can't.

The "Noted" program needs to be run, the specific screen edited, the file saved, the program exited, and the memory-resident Key Notes program rerun with the new data. This complicated procedure makes it too cumbersome to use Key Notes in fluid, constantly changing business situations.

The bottom line: Key Notes can be a marvelous tool where the data in the boxes is relatively constant. It's best where one person sets it up for many operators and is in charge of handling all the changes on a periodic basis. For PC users wanting to make frequent changes to the boxes, however, the complicated procedure to make changes could soon outweigh the benefits to be gained. It's available from Digital Learning Systems of Parsippany, N.J.

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